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JOHN PAUL II



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GOSPEL INTO THE THINGS  
OF THIS WORLD*

Discourse to the 350 participants in the III  
Congress of Secular Institutes

8.28.1984



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### *TO INFUSE THE SPIRIT OF THE GOSPEL INTO THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD*

#### Discourse to the 350 participants in the III Congress of Secular Institutes

(8.28.1984)

Brothers and sisters!

I. I am very happy to meet you once more, on the occasion of the World Congress of Secular Institutes, convened to consider the theme: *"Objectives and content of the formation of members of Secular Institutes"*.

This is the second meeting that I have had with you, and during the four years which have gone by since the previous one, occasions have not been lacking for me to address one Institute and then another.

But there was one particular occasion on which I spoke of you and for you. Last year, at the conclusion of the plenary meeting in which the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes considered the identity and the mission of your Institutes, I recommended, among other things, to the pastors of the Church to "foster among the faithful an understanding, which would not be approximate or generic, but exact, and respectful of the qualifying characteristics" of the Secular Institutes (AAS, LXXV, n. 9, p. 687). And I also touched on a point which concerns the subject of formation, which you have just finished considering: on the one hand exhorting the Secular Institutes to express ever more intensely their ecclesial communion,

and on the other hand reminding the bishops that they have the responsibility to "*offer the Secular Institutes all the doctrinal richness that they need*" (ibid., p. 688).

It is a pleasure for me to address myself directly to you today, Directors of Institutes and to those of you in charge of formation, to confirm the importance and the greatness of the work of formation. It is a work of primary importance, whether understood in regard to one's own formation or with regard to the responsibility of contributing to the formation of all those belonging to the Institute, with particular care during the first years, but with prudent attention thereafter and always.

2. Before all and above all, I exhort you to turn your attention toward the Divine Master, from whom you will obtain light for this work.

The Gospel can also be read as a report on the work of Jesus in regard to his disciples. Jesus proclaims from the beginning the "*good news*" of the fatherly love of God, but then he gradually teaches the profound riches of this message, and he gradually reveals himself and the Father, with infinite patience, beginning over again if necessary: "*After I have been with you all this time, you still do not know me?*" (Jn 14,9). We can also read the Gospel to discover the method Jesus used to give his disciples the basic formation, their initial training. The "*continuous formation*", as it is called, will come later, and the Holy Spirit will complete it, which will bring the Apostles to an understanding of how much Jesus had taught them, will help them to arrive at the fullness of the truth, to deepen it in their lives, and to follow in the way of the freedom of the sons of God (cf. Jn 14,26; Rm 8,14 ff).

From this look at Jesus and his lesson comes the confirmation of an experience that we have all had: none of us has reached the perfection to which he is called, each of us is always in formation, is always on the way.

St Paul writes that Christ must be formed in us (cf. Gal 4:19), so that we may be able to "*know the love of Christ which surpasses all*

knowledge" (Eph 3:19). But this understanding will not be full until we are in the glory of the Father (cf. 1 Cor 13:12). This knowing that we are always on the way is an act of humility, of courage and of faith, which finds confirmation and guidance in many pages of Scripture. For example, the journey of Abraham from his land to the goal unknown to him to which God calls him (cf. Gen 12:1 ff.); the pilgrim way of the people of Israel from Egypt to the promised land, from slavery to freedom (cf. Exodus); the ascent of Jesus himself to the place and the moment in which, *"lifted up from the earth, he will draw all men to himself"* (cf. Jn 12:32).

3. It is an act of humility which, as I said, makes us realise our own imperfection, one of courage to face toil, disappointments, the monotony of repetition and the novelty of renewal, and above all of trust, because God walks with us: indeed the way is Christ (cf. Jn 14:6), and the prime and principal author of all Christian formation is and cannot be other than he himself. God is truly the one who forms though making use of human occasions: *"O Lord, you are our father, we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands"* (Is 64:7).

This fundamental conviction must guide the work both of our own formation and the contribution that we may be called to make to the formation of others. To undertake the task of formation with the proper attitude means knowing that it is God that forms, and not we ourselves. We can and must become an opportunity and an instrument of formation, always respecting the mysterious action of grace.

Consequently the formation work concerning ourselves and those entrusted to us is always oriented, according to the example of Jesus, toward seeking the will of the Father: *"I am not seeking my own will but the will of him who sent me"* (Jn 5:30).

In fact, formation, in the ultimate analysis, consists in growing in the ability to place ourselves at the disposition of God's plans for each one and for history, in consciously offering our co-operation in his plan of redemption of persons and of creation, and in discovering

and living the value of salvation contained in every moment. *"Our Father, your will be done"* (Mt 6:9-10).

4. This reference to the divine will brings me to recall an observation I made to you in our meeting in 1980: at every and in all your daily activities there should be achieved *"a total availability to the will of the Father, who has put you in the world and for the world"* (Acta Apostolicae Sedis LXXII, n. 7, p. 1021). And this, as I mentioned before, signifies for you a particular attention to three aspects that converge in the reality of your specific vocation as members of Secular Institutes.

The first aspect concerns following Christ more closely in the way of the evangelical counsels, with a total giving of oneself to the person of the Saviour to share his life and mission. This giving, which the Church recognises as a special consecration, becomes also a questioning of human security when it is the fruit of pride, and it signifies more explicitly the *"new world willed by God and inaugurated by Jesus"* (LG 42; PC 11).

The second aspect is that of competence in your specific field, however common or modest it may be, with *"full consciousness of your own part in the building of society"* (AA 13), necessary in order to *"serve with greater generosity and efficacy"* our brothers (GS 93).

Your witness will thus be more credible: *"This is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another"* (Jn 13:5).

The third aspect refers to a transforming presence in the world, that is, to give *"a personal contribution to the realisation of the providential plan of God in history"* (GS 34), animating and perfecting the order of temporal realities with the evangelical spirit, acting within the midst of these realities (cf. LG 31; AA 7:16, 19).

My wish for you, as a fruit of this Congress, is to continue to deepen your formation, above all putting into action useful helps to place special emphasis on the three aspects already pointed out, and on every other essential aspect, as for example education in

faith, ecclesial communion, and evangelising action: and unifying all in a vital synthesis, necessary for growth in fidelity to your vocation and your mission, which the Church esteems and entrusts to you, because she recognises them as corresponding to her expectations and to those of humanity.

5. Before concluding I would like to emphasise a fundamental point: which is that the ultimate reality, in its fullness, is charity. *"He who abides in love abides in God, and God in him"* (1 Jn 4:16).

Also the final goal of every Christian vocation is love; in Institutes of consecrated life, the profession of the evangelical counsels becomes the main highway, which leads to the highest love of God and leads to our brothers, who are all called to divine sonship.

Now, in the midst of the work of formation, charity finds expression and support and maturation in fraternal communion, in order to become witness and action. The Church does not ask of your Institutes that life in common which is proper to religious Institutes, because of the demands of living in the world, which are postulated by your vocation. However, she asks for a *"fraternal communion rooted and founded in charity"*, which makes all the members *"one only particular family"* (can. 602); she requires that the members of one and the same Secular Institute *"preserve communion among themselves, solicitously guarding unity of spirit and true fraternity"* (can. 716, 2).

If the members breathe this spiritual atmosphere, which presupposes the most ample ecclesial communion, the work of formation in its fullness will not fail in its goal.

6. At the moment of conclusion, our vision returns to Jesus. All Christian formation is open to the fullness of the life of the sons of God, so that the subject of our activity is, in reality, Jesus himself: *"The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me"* (Gal 2:20). But this is true only if each one of us can say: *"I have been crucified with Christ"*, that Christ *"who gave himself for me"* (ibid.). It is the sublime law of that following of Christ: to embrace the Cross. The road of formation cannot leave it out of consideration.

May the Virgin Mother be an example for you in this regard. She who as the Second Vatican Council recalls "*while on earth her life was like that of any other, filled with labours and the cares of the home*" (AA 4), "*advanced in her pilgrimage of faith and faithfully persevered in union with her Son unto the Cross*" (LG 58).

And may the Apostolic Benediction, which I heartily impart to you and to all the members of your Institutes, be a pledge of divine protection.